**COPD and the Workplace: Know Your Risks and Take Action**

Among the millions of Americans with COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, most can point to smoking as the main reason they got the disease. Yet in about 15% of cases, people get COPD – which makes it hard to breathe and gets worse over time – after being regularly exposed to certain dusts, gases, chemical fumes or other pollutants in the workplace.

Workers in some jobs, like mining, manufacturing, housekeeping, farm work and vehicle repair, carry higher risks for work-related COPD than others. People in other jobs – for example, those in publishing or data processing, or who work in offices as administrative assistants and clerks – can be vulnerable, too. These workers can have contact with dusts and fumes from photocopiers, certain inks, paints and glues. People who are exposed at work to asbestos, pesticides, aerosol paint, dust or ash also may be at a greater risk of getting COPD.

If you work in a job that carries risks like these, there are things you can do to protect yourself. Talk to your employer about how to reduce exposures and get the right protective equipment for you. It’s also important to understand and recognize signs and symptoms of COPD.

According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), common symptoms of COPD include constant coughing, having a lot of mucus, tightness in your chest and shortness of breath. These may start out mild and get worse as time goes on, and you may think they are signs of aging, or even allergies. But it’s smart to be sure. Make an appointment with your health care provider as soon as you notice changes to your breathing or experience any other of the telltale symptoms.

Your health care provider will ask you questions about your family health history, your breathing, your smoking history and any pollutants you may have been exposed to at work or elsewhere. He or she will listen to your lungs and may advise that you get a spirometry test – a quick, simple way to see how well your lungs are working. Because there is no cure yet for COPD, seeing your health care provider is an important step to diagnosing the disease early and learning how to control it.

NHLBI’s *Learn More Breathe Better®* program provides free educational resources about COPD, including tip sheets and advice on how to manage COPD, so you can lead a full and active life. Find them at [copd.nhlbi.nih.gov.](http://copd.nhlbi.nih.gov/)